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– United Press International

James Earl Ray, convicted slayer of Dr. Martin Luther King, arrives at the Federal Building in Nashville under heavy guard.

Ray Argues in Court For a Regular Cell

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (UPI) — James Earl Ray told a federal judge today that he would rather risk being killed by fellow inmates than remain in maximum security at Tennessee State Prison.

The convicted killer of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. went before U.S. District Judge William E. Miller and asked that he be moved out of his isolated 6-by-9-foot cell in the prison's maximum security building.

Miller asked Ray if he would be in danger if permitted to mingle with other prisoners.

"No sir, not any more than anyone else," the handcuffed Ray answered. "There is a possibility of anyone getting killed. I would rather face that than 99 years in maximum security."

Thomas E. Fox, an assistant State's attorney, asked Ray if persons involved in an alleged conspiracy to murder King might want to kill him.

"If the state is interested in a conspiracy, let them have a trial," replied Ray, who had tried in vain seven months ago to get a new trial.

Ray was asked if he knew he was in prison for the death of a man with a great public following.

"No, I think I'm in prison because my attorney sold me out." Ray responded, referring to the deal Texas lawyer Percy Foreman made in March to spare his life with a 99-year sentence.

"The black people at the prison don't think I did it," Ray added.

Ray, pale from lack of sunshine and several pounds lighter than he was in March, complained at length about conditions in his cell.

For a long time, he said, the only thing in the room was a bed. He said he was provided a television set only after filing his petition for release from maximum security. The main problem, he said, was ventilation. "The cell was built for punishment and you never actually get any fresh air."

Nearly 50 state and federal officers guarded Ray as he was taken in handcuffs and chains in a motorcade to the courthouse.